

Richard Steacy

Pierce Mill A Past With a Future

Pierce Mill, in Washington, DC's Rock Creek Park, is a restored gristmill based on Oliver Evans' pioneering mill system. Evans (1755-1819) developed an automated flour mill by connecting existing machinery with a system of horizontal and vertical conveyor belts, allowing grain to travel more efficiently from one stage to another. Evans' system earned him the third U.S. patent, granted in 1790, and was the basis of factory automation later introduced by Henry Ford and other industrialists. Evans' published description of his system, *The Young Mill-wright & Millers Guide*, went through 15 printings.

Pierce Mill operated commercially until 1897. When Congress created Rock Creek Park in 1890, the Mill was incorporated into the park's boundaries. From 1905 to 1934, the Mill served as a tea house, which saved the structure from the wrecker's ball. When it assumed stewardship of the park in 1933, the NPS decided to restore Pierce Mill as an operating water-powered gristmill. A deteriorated waterwheel and main shaft forced the park to shut the mill down in 1993.

The NPS, working with the newly formed Friends of Pierce Mill, Inc., is planning to rehabili-

tate the site. A Historic Resource Study and environmental assessment will be written. The goal is to make Pierce Mill operational again, to stage grinding demonstrations, and to enhance the interpretation of milling technology. The rehabilitation will eventually include replacement of the waterwheel, main shaft, and other wood mechanisms. Environmental concerns will require the restoration of Rock Creek water to power the mill. From 1971, piped municipal water powered Pierce Mill. The rehabilitation will take about five years and cost one million dollars. In an era of tight budgets, our partnership with the Friends of Pierce Mill will be essential to achieving our goal.

Pierce Mill, which might be the unofficial "Oliver Evans' National Historic Site," will incorporate more information about the inventor's life and work it into its interpretive program. In the future, the Mill will include an Evans' site bulletin and, hopefully, sponsorship of an Oliver Evans Science & Technology Fair.

Although broken, Pierce Mill is not closed. Its technology is still "interpretable" and includes displays, children's activities, films, talks, and group tours. A complete tour of the site called "The History & Technology of Pierce Mill" is offered every Saturday and Sunday at 11:00 a.m. Information about special programs can be found on the Mill's webpage, <<http://www.nps.gov/rocr/piercemill>>; or by calling 202-426-6908.

Richard Steacy is a park ranger at Pierce Mill, Rock Creek Park.

The Harold Cook Professional Library at Agate Fossil Beds National Monument

The expeditions of paleontologists in search of Miocene mammal fossils at Agate Springs Ranch exposed Harold J. Cook, son of Nebraska frontiersman James H. Cook, to science at an early age. The site is now Agate Fossil Beds National Monument in Nebraska. The monument portrays the story of this research in a new diorama and exhibit. Less familiar to visitors are the papers of three generations of Cooks as well as Harold's professional library. Thousands of letters, manuscripts, clippings, books, and reprints document fossil discovery, western ranching, Indian relations, and early-20th century views of science and religion.

Mostly self-taught, but with stints at the University of Nebraska and Columbia, Harold Cook was a player in scientific and museum circles in Nebraska, Colorado, and Wyoming. Cook was Curator of Paleontology at the Colorado (now Denver) Museum of Natural History in the 1920s, when important discoveries were made at the Folsom site. He later managed Scotts Bluff National Monument in the 1930s; and, when not publishing or ranching, he was active in exploiting oil and mineral resources of the region. The Cook Collection is partially cataloged and microfilmed and available to researchers by appointment.